



When a Bargain Isn't a Bargain

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I have a storage room filled with various items I've bought over the years—some from stores, some from yard or garage sales. Finally, this Saturday, I am going to have my own yard sale and get not only some cash, but a clean storage room again.

The only problem I have is my son, Chris, who wanders into the room and, every so often, tries to salvage a few things from the pile. One item was a baby toy that I had picked up at a yard sale while my husband was stationed at MCB Quantico. I remember that sale. For \$10, I bought many hours of fun

for my son and ended up with a bargain for myself. I never checked to make sure the toys or articles I bought had been recalled or if they were safe for my family to use. But now I know that a bargain is not that great if it will harm my family.

There are some great bargains at yard sales and thrift stores. But along with the great buys, there are dangers. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) did a study revealing that recalled items regularly show up in yard sales and thrift shops. During a recent trip to a Navy Relief shop, I found several pieces of children's clothing with drawstrings

in the hoods, which the CPSC has warned against.

If you are a bargain hunter, and most of us are, here is what the CPSC advises:

Cribs: Make sure cribs meet current national safety standards and are in good condition. Look for a certification seal. Check that crib slats are no more than 2 3/8 inches apart. If they are too far apart, infants can get their heads between them and strangle. The crib mattress should fit snugly. If it doesn't, infants can fall between the mattress and crib and suffocate.

Clothing: Make sure there are no drawstrings around the hood and neck of children's outerwear, such as sweatshirts. Other types of fasteners, like snaps, zippers, or hook and loop fasteners, should be used. Drawstrings at the waist should extend no more than 3 inches. Drawstrings can catch on playground equipment and other toys and strangle young children.

Hair Dryers: Look for ones with large, rectangular-shaped safety plugs. These immersion-protection plugs prevent electrocution by shutting off the current if the hair dryer falls into water.

Halogen Floor Lamps: Make sure that halogen torchiere floor lamps have glass or wire guards over the bulb shield, and the bulb is 300 watts or less. Glass wire guards with lower wattage bulbs can prevent fires that occur when flammable materials, such as curtains, get too close to the lamp.

Playpens or Play Yards: Make sure these items haven't been recalled. Some recalled items include play yards with protruding hardware or rotating top rails that don't properly lock into place. Children can strangle if pacifier cords or clothing gets tangled on the hardware. Folding play yards can collapse and trap children.

Bunk Beds: Make sure all spaces between the guardrail and the bed frame and all spaces in the bed headboard and footboard of the top bunk are less than 3 1/2 inches. Make sure there are guardrails on both sides of the top bunk. Children can get trapped and strangle in the bed's structure or get wedged between the bed and the wall and suffocate. *[Note: Children under 6 years old should never sleep in a top bunk.—Ed.]*

Toy Basketball Nets: CPSC has recalled millions of hazardous toy basketball nets. Check before you buy. Children can strangle on loops or openings in these nets if they come unhooked from the rim or have knots that slide. If children put their

heads into these openings, the nets can get tangled around their necks.

Accordian-Style Gates: Avoid these types of gates. They don't meet current safety standards, and children can get their heads caught in them.

Bean-Bag Chairs: Don't buy any with zippers that can be opened. CPSC has recalled more than 12 million bean-bag chairs. Young children can unzip them and choke or suffocate on the small pellets or foam filling.

Electrical Appliances: Used appliances can have wiring problems that

can lead to house fires. Typical appliances are toasters, coffee pots and small ovens. Before you buy any of these items, check the cords and plugs. Before you buy any electrical appliance, ask the owner if you can plug it in and let it run for several minutes.

Car Seat Carriers: Make sure the carrier hasn't been recalled. The locks on these can unexpectedly release when you use them as a carrier outside a car. Infants can fall out if the handle disengages. **4**

[Note: The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) advises people not to buy used car seats, since there is no way to know if they have been in crashes or subjected to any stress. However, car seats are plentiful at thrift stores and flea markets. So, we went to thrift shops to look for car seats. Some were in deplorable condition, even with broken parts. We asked the owner to please take them out of the store. He agreed. However, when we went back a week later, they were still on display, just waiting for some unsuspecting parent.]

One thrift-store clerk denied they sold used car seats. She said they took them in but always threw them away so no one would use them. I asked about one that they had on the floor with a price tag attached. "Oh," said the clerk, "that's not for sale. I'm just waiting for the owner to come in to throw it away." Another shop had no car seats on display. I said to the clerk, "I see you aren't selling any used car seats." Before I could say anything further, he leaned over the counter and said, "If you want to see some, we keep them in the back room. We don't put them on display because people complain."—Ed.]

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there are great dangers.**